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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE IN DRAMA

Medieval drama

During the middle Ages, a great emphasis was placed on the blend of fantasy and reality. Though characters were given human characteristics, their personalities transcended to those of fictitious figures (God, Saints, and revered leaders). Additionally, these stories incorporated the codes of romance and honor, reliving the ideals of chivalry in writing. Furthermore, there was a religious overtone hidden in these works. Because only monks could hand-copy these manuscripts in monasteries, only a few were made available to the rich and noble. As for the peasants, the only way to pass down these stories from generation to generation was by words of mouth. For example, Geoffrey Chaucer (1343- 1400), the famous author of *The Canterbury Tales*, practiced these forms of writing in his narration of the social classes at this time. He was later known as one of the best medieval writers of all time. The Medieval Ages saw the beginnings of a rebirth in literature. Early medieval books were painstakingly hand-copied and illustrated by monks. Paper was a rarity, with vellum, made from calf's skin, and parchment, made from lamb's skin, were the media of choice for writing. Students learning to write used wooden tables covered in green or black wax. The greatest numbers of books during this era were bound with plain wooden boards, or with simple tooled leather for more expensive volumes. Wandering scholars and poets traveling to the Crusades learned of new writing styles. Courtly Love spawned a new interest in romantic prose. Troubadours sang in medieval courtyards about epic battles involving Roland, Arthur, and Charlemagne. Literature exploded from the universities as scholars began to question convention and write social commentary, as well as poetic fiction. Language saw further development during the middle Ages. Capital and lowercase letters were developed with rules for each. Books were treasures, rarely shown openly in a library, but rather, kept safely under lock and key. Finding someone who might loan you a book was a true friend. Some might rent out their books, while others, desperate for cash, might turn to the book as a valuable item to be pawned.

The Renaissance drama

The term Renaissance literally means "rebirth" and is the period in European civilization immediately following the middle Ages, conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in classical learning and values. The Renaissance also witnessed the discovery and exploration of new continents, the substitution of the Copernican for the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the decline of the feudal system and the growth of commerce, and the invention or application of such potentially powerful innovations as paper, printing, the mariner's compass, and gunpowder. To the scholars and thinkers of the day, however, it was primarily a time of the revival of classical learning and wisdom

after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation. The new birth of resurrection known as the "Renaissance" is usually considered to have begun in Italy in the fourteenth century, though some writers would date its origin from the reign of Frederick II, 1215-1250; and by this Prince - the most enlightened man of his age - it was at least anticipated. Well versed in languages and science, he was a patron of scholars, whom he gathered about him, from all parts of the world, at his court in Palermo. At all events the Renaissance was heralded through the recovery by Italian scholars of Greek and Roman classical literature. When the movement began, the civilization of Greece and Rome had long been exerting a partial influence, not only upon Italy, but on other parts of mediaeval Europe as well. But in Italy especially, when the wave of barbarism had passed, the people began to feel a returning consciousness of their ancient culture, and a desire to reproduce it. To Italians the Latin language was easy, and their country abounded in documents and monumental records which symbolized past greatness. The modern Italian spirit was produced through the combination of various elements, among which were the political institutions brought by the Lombards from Germany, the influence of chivalry and other northern forms of civilization, and the more immediate power of the Church. That which was foreshadowed in the thirteenth century became in the fourteenth a distinct development, which, as Symonds, its most discerning interpreter, shows us, was constructing a model for the whole western world.

In contrast to the religion-driven aspects of literature found during Medieval times, Renaissance thinkers reverted back to the idealism of classical civilizations during A.D. 1500-1660. Instead of focusing on the dreams of the future, Renaissance men and women were concerned with the "here and now". During this period, feelings and emotions were key to illustrating humanism, with the story more oriented on the character rather than the adventure. In addition, Renaissance literature revolved more around having a real humanistic protagonist with a real story to tell. These basic ideals evolved from a humble place in life to a materialistic dream steeped in luxury. Moreover, with the invention of the printing press in 1440 by Johann Gutenberg, manuscripts were no longer needed to be meticulously hand-copied, and were able to be printed and delivered to the mass public inexpensively and swiftly. With more men and women educated due to the indirect results of the printing press, literature became widespread throughout Europe. For example, John Milton (A.D. 1608-1674), in his notorious epic poem *Paradise Lost*, illustrated a more humanistic and prideful Lucifer who craves power in Heaven. This represents the change in ideas from the religious medieval literature into the secular themes of Renaissance literature. The word "renaissance" has of late years received a more extended significance than that which is implied in our English equivalent - the "revival of learning." We use it to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world; and though it is possible to assign certain limits to the period during which this transition took place, we cannot fix on any dates so positively as to say between this year and that the movement was accomplished. The great achievements of the Renaissance were the discovery of the world and the discovery of man.

Comparison of the Medieval and Renaissance Eras

Comparison of the Medieval and Renaissance Eras It is amazing how significantly various aspects of society can and will change over a prolonged period of time. Between the time periods of the

medieval era and the Renaissance, one can note numerous significant changes, mainly those pertaining to art and religion. In general, ideals and subjects during the Renaissance became more secular. In Medieval times, people seemed to focus mainly on the church, God, and the afterlife; whereas during the Renaissance, the focus was more secular: humans and life on earth. Although these two eras differ in many ways, the most concentrated differences deal with the realms of architecture, painting, and philosophy. Architecture noticeably shifted from religious awe to classical reason between the medieval era and the Renaissance. During the middle Ages, architecture was aimed mainly at making advancements in the church. Medieval cathedrals had very distinct features, such as pointed spires, which were exactly that -- spires, or steeples, that were pointed and extended upward from the tower area; the rose window, which was a large Stained glass window that was located on the front of the tower; and squared-off exterior walls, which were a contrast to the usual rounded exterior designs that people were accustomed to. Overall, cathedrals during this time could have very elegant features due to the excellent techniques of support and stabilization. Buttresses, simple extensions of the cathedral wall to enhance support, and flying buttresses, stone structures set away from the cathedral wall and attached at the top, contributed to the excellent support that medieval cathedrals experienced. While architectural advancements during the Middle Ages were concerned mainly with making elegant reformations in the structure of the cathedral, architecture during the Renaissance was much less religion-centered, and evolved more around classical reason and secularity. Architecture in this time was concentrated mostly with the design of castles, such as the home of the prevailing Italian Medici family, perhaps the richest family in Europe. Architectural focus had changed from the cathedral in the medieval era to other, more classical and secular subjects, such as castles and homes of significant rulers. The style, subjects, and overall attitude of painting was something that underwent very significant changes during the progression from medieval times to the Renaissance. Generally, paintings became more secular, and less focused on aspects of the church, as the Renaissance approached. Medieval paintings seem to be focused almost entirely on religion and are given heavenly attributes, while paintings of the Renaissance consist mainly of secular subjects and contain much more realism, especially noted in human subjects. In Giotto's *Madonna with Child*, a Medieval painting, any observer will obviously notice that the child and woman are very awkwardly proportioned, indicating the lack of realism. However, in the *Mona Lisa*, by DaVinci, and *The Marriage of the Virgin*, by Raphael, both paintings of the Renaissance, it is evident the amount of realism that the artists were attempting to portray. Both of these paintings are extremely realistic, seemingly three-dimensional, very well-proportioned, and involve large amounts of shading to accentuate the realism. When considering the subjects of medieval painting, the majority of them were religious oriented or somehow involved the church, whereas religion or the church was seldom involved in Renaissance paintings. Rather, paintings of the Renaissance involved mostly secular subjects, as seen again in DaVinci's *Mona Lisa* and also Raphael's *The School of Athens*. In the case of the *Mona Lisa*, the subject is atypical woman with a very sublime smile, but with no apparent religious association whatsoever. The same applies to *The School of Athens*; it is a painting of a group of philosophers in a barrel-vaulted and domed hall: no religious connection can be made here, either. On the contrary, the medieval painting, *The Annunciation*, deals with exactly that: an annunciation, a religious event in which many Christian churches commemorate the announcement of the incarnation of Luke. As shown in these examples, painting took a very secular turn in the Renaissance from the religious-based paintings that were found in the middle Ages. Perhaps the greatest and most evident way in which the Medieval and Renaissance time periods

differ is found in the opposing premises of philosophy. Again, the theme of progression from religious-oriented thoughts in the middle Ages to the secular ideals of the Renaissance is evident. The Medieval philosopher, Aristotle, proposed the logic that the systematic ordering of knowledge, in addition to reason, need to be applied to the Bible in order for one to be ultimately successful. This logic is pointed directly at the significance of religion and the church during the time. In addition to Aristotle's proposed logic, the general view of people in the middle Ages was that of putting faith in the church, with hopes that that is where their problems could be solved and their questions could be answered. During the latter Renaissance, however, thoughts were more associated with life on earth. New confidence in human abilities and thought was developed, and there were many more inquiries pertaining to science and reason, rather than religion as it was in the middle Ages. Philosophic developments during the Renaissance were made to be more practical and had more realistic applications to the "real world." The philosopher, Machiavelli, is an example of this, as he made attempts to find a balance between freedom and authority, something that was very useful in life and put no confidence in the church or God. He developed the idea that a corrupt society needs to find a strong leader to govern so that the people can learn to be capable of self-government. This was a practical idea and applicable to everyday life. Ideals during the Renaissance became more directed toward practicality concerning life on earth and put less faith in the church than did the people living in the Middle Ages. The ultimate changing theme that was evident during the progression from the Medieval to Renaissance eras was that of religious-based ideals to ideals that were much more secular. People took a turn from putting all their

faith in the church and concerning themselves with the afterlife, and began developing practical logic and reason toward living their life on earth. As seen in the differences in architecture, painting, and philosophy, attitudes and morals of people living in the Renaissance were much different and more secular-based than those of people living in the middle Ages. Medieval times were based mainly on trust in one's own religion and church, while the Renaissance involved a time period in which people developed an increasing pursuit in learning and imaginative responses to broaden horizons.

Medieval and Renaissance relationship

Medieval and Renaissance literature were influenced by two completely different eras in human history. During the Middle Ages, (A.D. 1066- 1500) the toils of daily life affected the mindset of those at this time. As a result, these ideas found its way into the making of medieval literature. However, after the great rediscovery of the classical civilizations during A.D. 1500- 1660, men began creating what is now looked upon as Renaissance literature. Though they are both forms of writing, their history as a part of society greatly differed from contrasting philosophies of life, leading to two different personalities.

The most critical distinction between Medieval and Renaissance culture was in spiritual character, most eminently expressed in the literary and visual arts, particularly through the motif of journey and self-discovery. While Middle Ages featured communal society and a feudal relationship between knight and king, Renaissance society grew increasingly mercantile and gave rise to individuality, a growth of humanistic thought, and a return to the classics as a perfect model for living and learning. Medieval ideals of courtly love and honor were replaced in Renaissance by

the classical notion of Platonic love and were much parodied and satirized in Renaissance literature and theatre. Examples are Boiardo's "Orlando Inamorato," Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso," and "Don Quijote de la Mancha." Playwright Aretino and writer Castiglione both found humor in their satiric representations of humanity, pointing out man's fallible and imperfect nature. These works both feature mystical self-journey or pilgrimage, stressed with a fantastic use of the supernatural as Orlando trooped through military strife and courtly love romps in a perpetual search for happiness. A return to classicism was characterized by new ideals of beauty in art. Alberti's treatise on art expounded new dimensions of linear perspectives in all genres of art, those which artists strove to emulate through their creative works. The ideal of beauty included man's refined knowledge of the classical languages and texts, as well as a material wealth to learn and cultivate classical knowledge and emulate the physical perfection of his natural environment. Indeed, Politian was the first poet to break away from such a dynamic tradition. Thus paintings and theatre, for instance, no longer re-enacted the drama of the Biblical Passion Cycle. Man was no longer fixated on the duties of avoiding temptation and guaranteeing the Salvation of his soul; Renaissance man could now find his own solutions to problems through trial and error in a new venture of self-discovery through the five senses. Therefore the artist became a vehicle of cultural and national expression, particularly after the invention of print. The Virgin Mary lost her stereotypical grief as Renaissance painter Raphael gave her personality an element of poetic grace and inner strength, as well as a brand new sense of intellectuality. While mythology surmised much thematic content in Renaissance art, such poetic expression shaped Renaissance ideals as a focal point. It became fashionable to commemorate members of the signoria, royalty, and donors of art through poetry, painting, and the novella, for example. The invention of the formal voice in narrative in the "cornice" of the novella was a sharp contrast to the illuminated manuscript and the oral traditions of the middle Ages. The portrait was related to dedicational art. The portrait, which originated in northern Europe, corresponded to such a formal note. Da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra di Benci, and Pietro della Francesca's double portraits of Duke of Montefeltro and Battista Sforza's triumphs are examples of such commemorations; indeed these works reinforce the Renaissance ideals of human quality. Certainly these included a travelled worldliness, military skill, grace, beauty, and intelligence. Self-portraiture was another invention which was directly related to the elevated significance of human intellect in the Renaissance. An emphasis on the head and hands echo the humanist concept that man's beauty lay in his own creative ability. A most striking instance of such logic is emphatic in German Albrecht Durer's mystical "Self-Portrait at 28." This amazingly true to life self-portrait stirs the Renaissance motif of pilgrimage to life and truly immortalizes the artist, who died of fever in 1528. An indexed finger pointing to himself in recognition, traced to a tiny triangular white speck on his bosom indicates a discovery of the Holy Spirit out of a voyage from within.

Therefore, the medieval motif of pilgrimage in Renaissance art truly captured the universal essence of man's quest for purpose and happiness in life. Although newer ideals continuously transform our millenium's interpretation of Renaissance man, our link to him remains permanent through an eternal quest for truth. The message is still the same: to find the right path, one must first begin with an introspective view at one's self.

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